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UNCLAS TAIPEI 003341

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SENSITIVE

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: NEW CDC DIRECTOR TALKS ABOUT POST-SARS TAIWAN

REF: STATE 225331

1. (SBU) While delivering reftel demarche to the Taiwan Center for Disease Control on October 21, AIT became acquainted with the CDC's new director, Steve H.S. Kuo. Kuo introduced himself, saying that he just assumed his new position on October 18, after working in Washington for four years as the Health Advisor at the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office (TECRO). He explained that in the post-SARS era, political will in Taiwan was strong for expanding the government's capacity for dealing with future outbreaks of infectious diseases. Kuo detailed some of the changes: the CDC's budget has been increased from \$61 million to \$100 million a year; it is actively recruiting young, ambitious physicians, expanding its medical staff from 3 to 30; and there is a proposal currently under consideration that would earmark an additional \$300 million to finance a new vaccine production facility in Taiwan that would combat avian flu and other diseases.

2. (SBU) Kuo described his efforts to increase cooperation between the Taiwan CDC and its US counterpart. He said that a 1994 umbrella agreement between the Taiwan Department of Health (DOH) and the US CDC was a good foundation for such cooperation, citing the example of a 1999 implementation of that agreement for a joint project to control the spread of tuberculosis. Taiwan, he explained, is an important partner for the US in a global public health network. Every year millions of Taiwanese businesspeople and tourists travel to and from the Mainland, including those parts of southern China where many infectious diseases first appear. With its sophisticated detection technology and modern, transparent public health infrastructure, he said, Taiwan is ideally situated to act as a "sentinel" for new diseases coming out of China. He said that he looked forward to any opportunities to cooperate with the US and that he envisioned Taiwan becoming an essential part of a global disease prevention network.
PAAL